

**BRATTLEBORO SELECTBOARD
TUESDAY, APRIL 22, 2014
SPECIAL MEETING – 6:30PM
MINUTES**

Selectboard members present: David Gartenstein, Kate O'Connor, David Schoales, John Allen, and Donna Macomber.

Staff present: Interim Town Manager Patrick Moreland, Finance Director John O'Connor, Finance Director John O'Connor, Public Works Director Steve Barrett, Highway/Utilities Superintendent Hannah O'Connell, Fire Chief Mike Bucossi, Assistant Fire Chief Peter Lynch, Police Chief Gene Wrinn, Police Captain Mike Fitzgerald, Library Director Jerry Carbone, Town Assessor Russell Rice, Town Clerk Annette Cappy, and Planning Director Rod Francis.

Media present: Tim Johnson representing WTSA, Howard Weiss-Tisman representing the Brattleboro Reformer, and Olga Peters Representing The Commons.

Others present: Steve Minkin, George Reed-Savory, Judy Davidson, Lynn Russell, Spoon Agave, Michael Bosworth, Bill Dion, John Carter, Dora Bouboulis, Jane Southworth, Arlene Distler, BCTV staff and volunteers, and others who did not sign the attendance sheet.

Chair Gartenstein called the meeting to order at 6:30pm in the Selectboard meeting room. He confirmed that the meeting was officially warned.

FY15 BUDGET

Gartenstein reviewed the history of the FY15 budget vote. He said that the budget was approved at Representative Town Meeting on March 22, that a petition was circulated and signed by the necessary number of Town Meeting Representatives for a referendum to provide the voters at large with an opportunity to vote on the budget. He said that the voters overturned the Representatives' decision and the FY15 budget was defeated at a Special Town Meeting on April 17. He said that the procedure to move forward would be for the Selectboard to construct and present another budget to the Town Meeting Members at a Special Representative Town Meeting. The Board would need to approve a warning and schedule a Special Representative Town Meeting between 30-40 days of the warning. After the special meeting, there would be a ten day period for a petition to be filed for a referendum for a public vote, and the public vote would be scheduled no more than fourteen days after the petition was received.

Gartenstein said that the Board needed to respond to the voters and he discussed his opinion that the new budget should be in the range of \$0.00 to \$0.03 tax increase. He proposed that the second bond of \$9 million for the Police-Fire facilities upgrade be taken out of budget and that discussions about the project continue later to address the life safety and structural issues at the facilities. He also suggested cutting two fulltime positions at the Library, two fulltime positions at Recreations & Parks, eliminate the Animal Control Officer position in the Police Department, eliminate sidewalk show plowing, disband Human Services Funding Committee and have Human Services funding requests go through the Selectboard, eliminate the expenditure for a traffic safety device (\$5,000), and reconsider expanding infrastructure, such as a new skatepark, until emergency services infrastructure work is affordable and completed.

Schoales said that the budget vote was about the Police-Fire project. He said that two options would be (1) to reduce the scope, pace, and financing structure and the go forward with a revised project, or (2) discuss solving only the explicit needs that exist in the facilities now. He said that he would not support staff or service cuts at this point.

MOTION BY DAVID SCHOALES THAT THIS MEETING BE FOCUSED EXCLUSIVELY ON THE POLICE-FIRE PROJECT.

There was discussion about the motion and other matters.

Macomber stated that she was not in favor of staff cuts at this time with the exception of eliminating the Animal Control Officer. She said that she understood the voters disagreed about the size and scope of the Police-Fire project, but she was concerned about the safety of the emergency services officers and the infrastructure, and she wanted to continue those discussions about the upgrades with input from the Department Heads. She cautioned against overreacting to the budget concerns and not to compromise the experience of living in the community.

O'Connor read a list of suggestions from members of the public to reduce the budget and the tax burden, including cut sidewalk plowing, cut overnight plowing, close the Library, close Recreation & Parks except for the pool, combine the Treasurer, Town Clerk & Listers offices, and cut the Human Services budget. She said that she would look toward a zero increase in property taxes so that about \$1 million would have to be cut. She suggested not taking out the \$9 million bond for the Police-Fire project and looking at reducing the amount of staff.

Allen spoke first to the motion saying that there was an overall concern about taxes being too high, and that the budget defeat was not only about the Police-Fire project. He said that he wanted to achieve a zero tax increase so all possible cuts should be discussed.

SCHOALES WITHDREW HIS PENDING MOTION.

The Board continued the general discussion about possible budget reductions. Gartenstein said that the voters sent a message over a concern that taxes were too high and that it was not just about the Police-Fire project. Allen suggested completing renovations to the Central Fire Station, close the operations at West Brattleboro Fire Station and use the facilities for storage of equipment, not borrowing the additional \$9 million bond, look at possible personnel cuts, and consider a single stream trash system. Finance Director O'Connor John O'Connor suggested reducing non-grant funds from the capital budget for sidewalk work, reducing the purchase of police cruisers to only one, and considering possible reductions in the overtime budget. Moreland asked for a unified list of cuts or for a dollar amount of reductions, and suggested that the Board address the health and safety issues existing at the Police and Fire facilities.

There was substantial discussion by the Board about the many suggestions that had been raised, the costs associated with the Police-Fire renovation project, amount to be cut from the budget, and disruption in services in connection with the cuts. The Chair opened the floor for public comment.

Steve Minkin spoke about the democratic process and aspects of the vote and suggested that the main objection by the public was to the cost of one capital expenditure. He suggested it would be antidemocratic to talk about cuts other than to the Police-Fire project. George Reed-Savory said that members of the community were scared and in fear of losing their homes. He said that the vote was a statement about the Police-Fire project, and suggested looking at union contracts and the generous retirement plans. Judy Davidson said there was substantial objection to the cost of Police-Fire project, and that the cost of the project keep within the \$5 million bond already borrowed. She cautioned about overreaction in cutting the budget and suggested that cuts should be even throughout departments and not just focused on the Library and Recreation & Parks. Lynn Russell thanked the Board for its willingness to listen to voters. She suggested not borrowing the additional \$9 million bond, to consider decreasing individual wages in order to keep all employees, suggested that the Selectboard and School Board members donate their salaries back to the Town, and that the Board ask the voters how they feel about the Police-Fire project. Spoon Agave said that voters were looking for a strong signal that the Board was rethinking business as usual. He cautioned against dramatic cuts, suggested that the Board consider ideas and assistance from community members, and that it find new ways to determine the process to set a budget. Michael Bosworth said that he polled many residents before the special town meeting and he concluded that many people were concerned about the cost of the Police-Fire project but very few people discussed concerns about present services. He also suggested implementing a four day week. Bill Dion spoke of concerns to the cost of the Police-Fire project, of cutting sidewalk plowing, or cutting the Library. He cautioned about overreacting with cuts and suggests using college and high school students for preliminary work to the Police-Fire project. John Carter said that most of the objection to the budget was due to the cost of the Police-Fire project. He cautioned against overreaction in cuts and suggested that Board members could go door to door to speak with residents. Dora Bouboulis said

that the Police-Fire project was too costly and out of scale for the size and population of the Town, and that a project of this scale should have gone to town-wide vote. Jane Southworth suggested that citizens work with the Selectboard and that the Board announce meetings in order to accommodate public involvement and opinions about cuts. Arlene Distler said that the tax rate and the Police-Fire project should be considered together. She asked whether a previous request to reduce the budget by \$200,000 could be reconsidered.

Moreland asked the Board for direction in calculating possible cuts. He asked if administration should prepare a report on how to best use the \$5 million borrowed for the Police-Fire project, whether to address only the life safety and structural concerns at the Police and Fire facilities, and whether to provide costs for changing terms of contracts at this point.

Gartenstein asked the administration to identify cost savings from the following suggestions: exclude the \$9 million bond payment from FY15 budget (\$261,473), eliminate the Animal Control Officer position and associated vehicles and infrastructure, cut one to two Library employees, cut one to two Recreation & Parks employees, eliminate sidewalk snowplowing, cut expense for traffic safety devices (\$5,000), reduce sidewalk capital (\$50,000), eliminate purchase of a second police cruiser, and provide results of a 5% cut in each department. There was further discussion about reducing overtime costs, work hours, the skatepark, pay-as-you-throw (PAYT) trash collection, disbanding the Human Services Committee, looking generally at the Police-Fire Facility project, temporarily suspending work on the Police-Fire project, closing the West Brattleboro fire station, and other requests from the public.

The Board agreed to meet again on Tuesday, April 29 at 6:30pm to continue the discussion and to warn the Special Representative Town Meeting for the budget vote.

MOTION BY DAVID SCHOALES AT 8:04PM TO ADJOURN. MOTION CARRIED 5-0.

David Schoales, Clerk